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Over the Brink

Just when you begin to think that Mr. Dulles has moderated his brinkmanship, along comes another article or book based on conversations with the Secretary of State to prove you wrong. There are many passages in John Robinson Beal's adoring biography, *John Foster Dulles*, that will cause heated controversy and indignation through the free world; but the most provocative is the assertion that Mr. Dulles carefully planned the manner in which last summer he withdrew the offer to help Egypt build the Aswan Dam. As Mr. Beal describes the situation, "It was necessary to call Russia's hand in the game of economic competition . . . Nasser combined the right timing, the right geography, and the right order of magnitude for a truly major gambit in the cold war."

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This is a shocking indictment, although Mr. Beal patently did not intend it as such. Communist arms going to Egypt in large quantities, and an increasing number of anti-Western moves on the part of Colonel Nasser, made the decision to withdraw the aid offer logical enough in itself. Yet up until recently the general assumption had been that Mr. Dulles' insult to Nasser in his conversation with the Egyptian Ambassador was more or less accidental, and that the Egyptian reaction was not anticipated. The British, for example, knew of and supported the decision to cancel the offer; they understood, however, that the dam project would merely be indefinitely postponed.

But no. According to Mr. Beal,

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Since the issue involved more than simply denying Nasser money for a dam, a polite and concealed rebuff would fail to make the really important point. It had to be forthright, carrying its own built-in moral for neutrals in a way that the ormolu of applied propaganda would not cheapen. As a calculated risk the decision was on a grand scale, comparable to the calculated risks of war taken in Korea and Formosa.

It is of course always possible that Mr. Beal overstates the case, if not as to the facts, at least as to motivations (no one would quarrel with the basic judgment that Nasser was intractable). Nevertheless, the account squares with a recent speech by C. D. Jackson, also of *Time* and *Life* and a former Canal Co., but also for the increasing desperation of Mr. Dulles' three other brinks in Korea, Indo-China and Formosa. Mr. Beal adds a significant footnote to Formosa policy by telling of a hitherto secret letter from President Eisenhower to Chiang Kai-shek "assuring him that the United States would help defend Quemoy and Matsu"—a tacit commitment in which Congress ought to be tensely interested.

All of this serves to paint Mr. Dulles as the most reckless sort of gambler. Always before it has been possible to regard the Aswan-Suez episode as an accident. Now Mr. Dulles is portrayed as the champion of purposeful irresponsibility, the inventor of the calculated blunder. The tale places on Mr. Dulles an additional share of the blame, not only for Nasser's nationalization of the Suez Canal Co., but also for the increasing desperation in Britain and France, the Suez invasion and the drastic erosion of Western interests.

It is hard to believe that Mr. Dulles could be so totally Machiavellian. But he will have a difficult time climbing out of this hole; and there will properly be increasing demands for a White Paper on the whole story of relations with Nasser. If the Beal account is correct, is it any wonder that Mr. Dulles is mistrusted abroad?